

Exhibit 5

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Exclusive: NIH to terminate hundreds of active research grants

Studies that touch on LGBT+ health, gender identity and DEI in the biomedical workforce could be terminated, according to documents obtained by *Nature*.

By [Max Kozlov](#) & [Smriti Mallapaty](#)



The main historical building on the campus of the US National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland. Credit: Gibson Green/Alamy

In an unprecedented move, [the US National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](#) has begun mass terminations of research grants that fund active scientific projects because they no longer meet “agency priorities”.

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NIH staff members have been instructed to identify and potentially cancel grants for projects studying transgender populations, gender identity, diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in the scientific workforce, environmental justice and any other research that might be perceived to discriminate on the basis of race or ethnicity, according to documents and an audio recording that *Nature* has obtained. Grants that allot funding to universities in China and those related to climate change are also under scrutiny.

At least 16 termination letters have already been sent out, says Brittany Charlton, an epidemiologist at the Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health in Boston, Massachusetts, who has been tracking them. And hundreds more will be coming, say two NIH officials, who requested anonymity because they are not authorized to speak to the press.

“It’s extremely alarming that grants that have been vetted by the scientific community and deemed important and impactful to understand the world are now being cancelled because of political ideology,” says Lisa Fazio, a cognitive psychologist at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, who studies misinformation. “For all this talk about free speech, this is direct censorship of scientific research.”

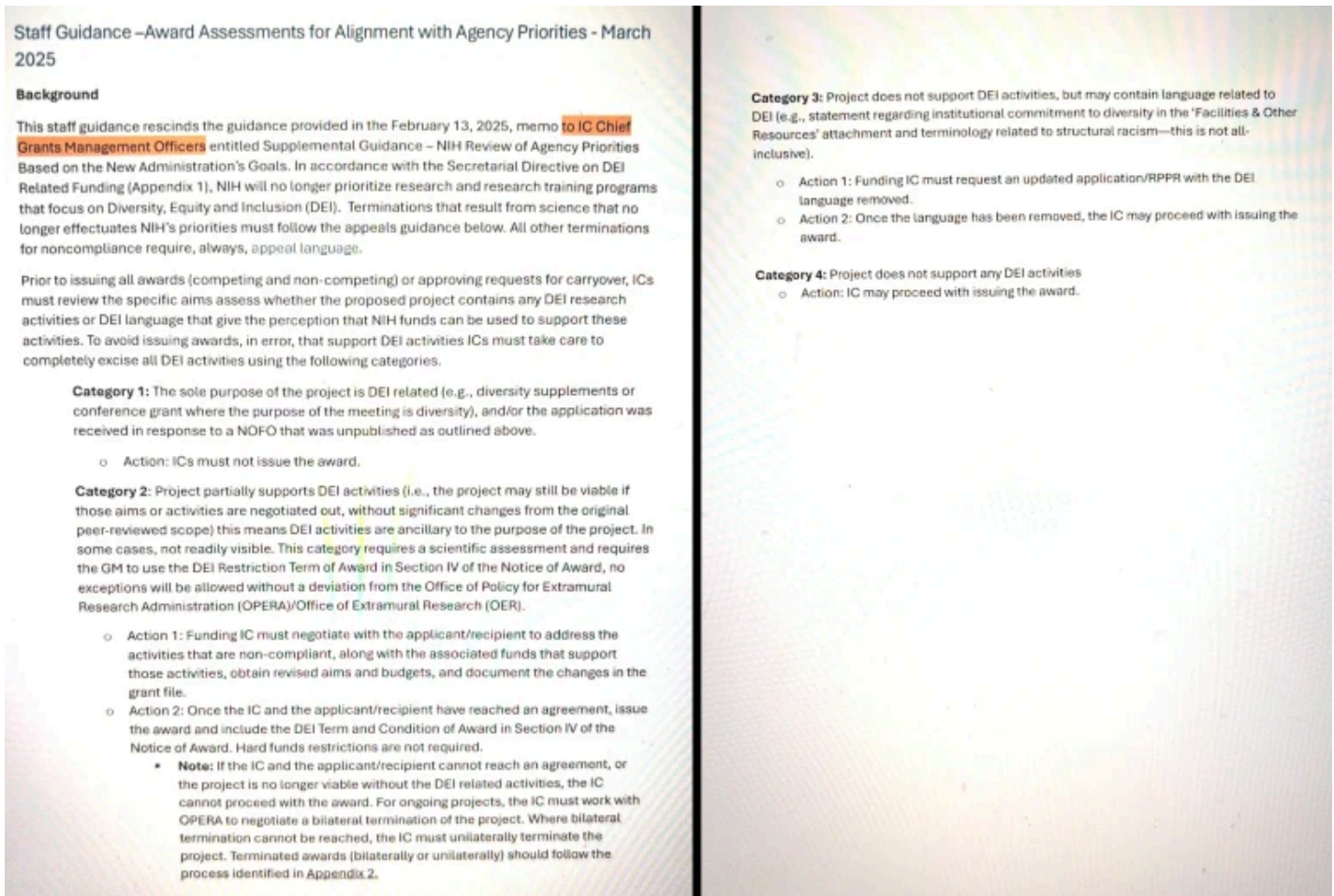
The actions come [during the second month of US President Donald Trump's presidency](#); on his first day in office, Trump issued executive orders [“restoring free speech” to the American people](#) and [“defending women from ‘gender ideology extremism’”](#) by banning federal funds that “promote or otherwise inculcate gender ideology”.

The NIH, which is the largest public funder of biomedical research in the world, did not respond to *Nature's* queries about the grant terminations, their legality or how many the agency anticipated sending out.

Cut categories

Although many NIH research grants run for longer, scientists generally receive their funding one year at a time and are required to submit a progress report to the agency annually. NIH staff members then review this report and can issue a continuation of funding.

The agency, based in Bethesda, Maryland, has now asked its employees to review new and ongoing projects for any DEI activities and to place them in one of four categories: projects that solely support DEI-related activities (category one), projects that partially support these activities (category two), projects that do not support these activities but include some DEI-related language (category three) and projects that do not support any DEI activities (category four).



Guidance document obtained by *Nature* that describes the four categories all active NIH grants should now be grouped into.

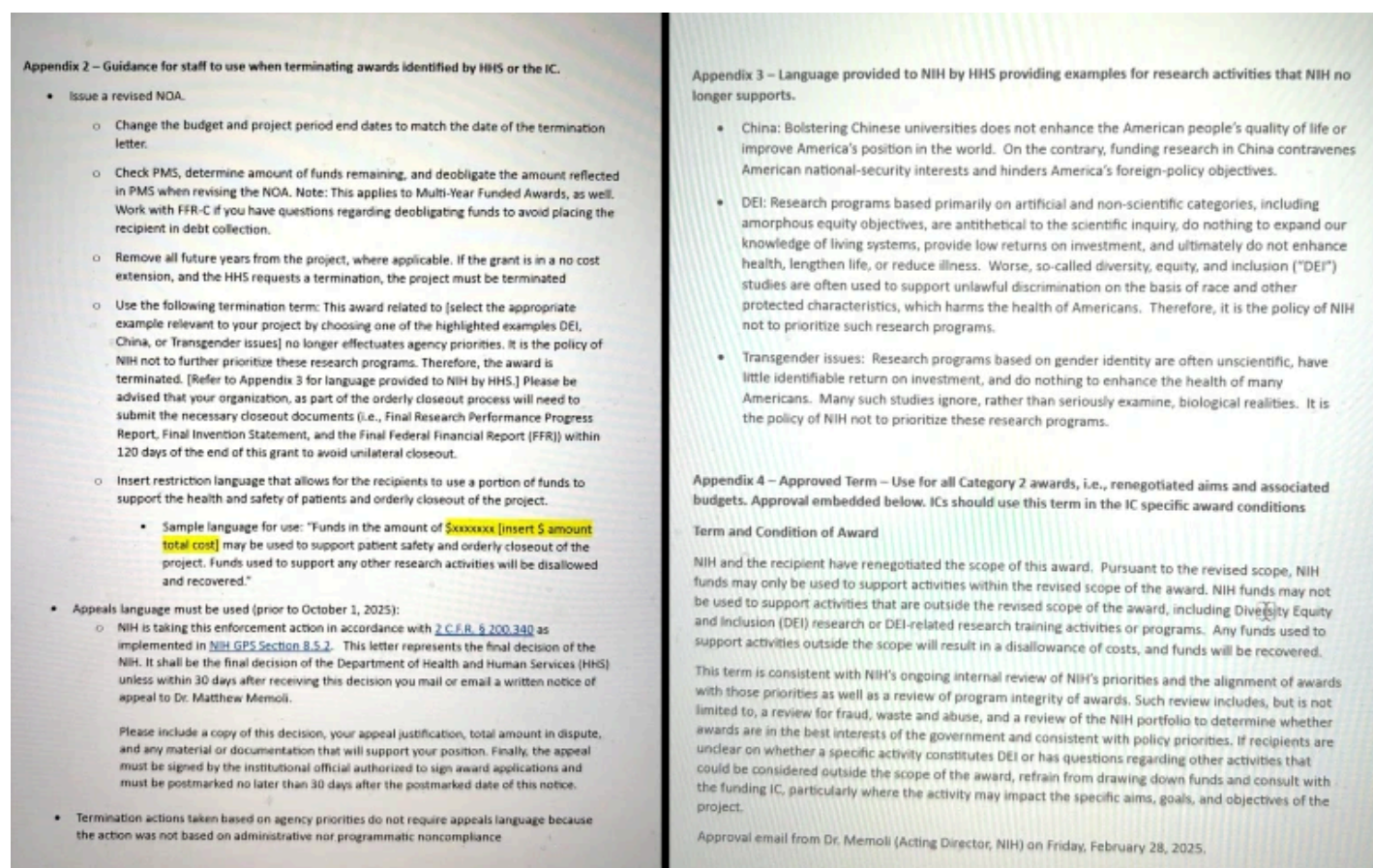
The NIH's 27 institutes and centres should not issue awards for research in category one, according to a guidance document obtained by *Nature* and sent to some employees this week. Category-two research must be renegotiated with the lead researcher or institution on the grant to remove any DEI activities. If the work cannot be renegotiated, the institute must seek termination of the project, the document says.

Category-three and -four research can continue unimpeded as long as any DEI language is stripped from the application or progress report.

Although the guidance document focuses on DEI activities, it also includes an appendix with examples of other research that the NIH no longer supports. For example, projects funding research in China and that touch on "transgender issues" will be terminated.

This guidance was drafted by the deputy director of the NIH's Office of Extramural Research (OER), Liza Bundesen, and approved by acting NIH director Matthew Memoli, according to an e-mail that *Nature* has obtained. Bundesen, who took the helm of OER less than three weeks ago, is leaving the agency on 7 March, according to an NIH official who requested anonymity because they are not authorized to speak to the press.

The guidance does not specify how to determine if a project is discriminatory, which has created confusion and anxiety among agency staff, another NIH official says. Many fear losing their jobs, so this might lead to over-interpretation of the guidance, which would hold back more science than “needs to be”, they say. “For example, is a grant providing culturally-appropriate care specifically to Hispanic and Latino populations ‘discrimination?’”



Appendices obtained by *Nature* describing research that NIH no longer supports.

Lost data

Tara McKay, who studies the health of people from sexual and gender minorities (LGBT+) at Vanderbilt University, received an e-mail from the NIH late on 28 February. It said that the agency was pulling funding for her project tracking the health of more than 1,200 LGBT+ adults in the United States.

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McKay's study aims to understand the sources of stress and resilience for LGBT+ people, conduct cognitive screening and collect blood samples to understand how they are ageing over the span of a decade. "Longitudinal research gets its value from time points," she says.

Cancelling a grant part way through means that follow-up data will be lost, she says, and "it devalues the earlier money spent".

The e-mail that McKay received said that her grant did not satisfy certain criteria and then pointed to it including "transgender issues", saying that such research programmes are "often unscientific, have little identifiable return on investment, and do nothing to enhance the health of many Americans". This language repeats exactly the internal NIH guidance document.

McKay says that her project does not centre on the experience of transgender people, but merely includes people who identify as such. "That is not a population we're willing to leave behind in our work," she adds.

[One in ten adults in the United States identify as LGBT+](#), and that number is twice as high in young people, because social acceptance has increased in that age group, Charlton says. "We know that our community faces a lot of discrimination, which adversely impacts public health," she says. "We have to find a way to continue this work."

These grant terminations send a message of fear, and signal to scientists and universities that they shouldn't trust that grants will be honoured, Fazio says. Animal research will

also not be spared: after Trump discussed research “making mice transgender” in a speech to the US Congress on 4 March, the Department of Government Efficiency, advised by billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk, [posted on the social-media platform X](#) that the NIH cancelled seven grants that were developing rodent models to test hormone therapies.

Fazio adds that it is ironic for an administration that is so concerned about efficiency to cancel these projects halfway through. “We’re losing the output of these projects that can help the health of Americans,” she says.

Legal challenges ahead?

The Trump administration’s termination of NIH grants that include specific topics is just its latest attempt to crack down on ‘DEI activities’.

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On 27 January, the US Office of Management and Budget under Trump [tried to freeze all federal grants and loans](#), saying that it needed to review government spending to ensure that it aligned with [executive orders issued by Trump](#) to end “illegal and immoral” DEI programmes. A federal judge temporarily blocked this freeze on 29 January, and [later excoriated the Trump administration for defying his order](#).

A second order issued by the same judge directed the US government to resume the funding of agencies, specifically mentioning the NIH by name, making the legality of the recent grant terminations dubious, says David Super, an administrative-law specialist at Georgetown University Law Center in Washington DC. “This might be research this administration doesn’t care about or support, but they’re going to violate the order if they’re terminating for reasons other than misconduct.”

With the NIH terminating existing grants and [withholding new grants](#), and many grant-review meetings still suspended, the agency “will have great difficulty spending its money” by the end of the fiscal year on 30 September, Super says. That would amount to an illegal “impoundment” of funds appropriated by Congress, he adds.

Are the Trump team’s actions affecting your research? [Share information with Nature’s news team, or make suggestions for future coverage here.](#)

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